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ABSTRACT

An entrance and exit interview procedure designed to evaluate student progress in an intensive English program (IEP) is discussed. The program offers six terms of 7 weeks each per year. Students are interviewed within the first 10 days after classes have started, always by the same individual. Both personal and placement information are gathered, and the results recorded on computer. The entrance interview provides an opportunity to build rapport with the student, learn about the student's experience, have students think about their hopes and expectations, become aware of unrealistic expectations, and begin the acculturation process. Exit interviews are conducted at the end of the last term with students anticipating leaving the program. Students and interviewer compare entry and exit language skill levels, talk about the program experience, discuss reverse culture shock if the student is returning to a native language environment, and discuss the demands of American higher education when appropriate. The exit interview has been useful in bringing closure to the student's language learning experience, learning student perspectives, identifying staff development ideas, gathering needed accreditation information, tracking students academically and culturally, and establishing relationships with learners. Entrance and exit interview questions are appended. (MSE)

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ED 410 757

Using an Entrance and Exit Interview Process to Assess the Effectiveness of an IEP Program

Madeline B. Garr

This session deals with the construction of and implementation of an entrance and exit interview process in an Intensive English Program.

As the Academic Coordinator and a teacher at the International English Institute in Nashville, Tennessee I have developed an entrance and exit interview process in order to assess the effectiveness of our IEP. The place where I work, The International English Institute, was established 20 years ago by Frances and Ande Clark, who saw a need in our community for intensive language training for adults who were either moving to the US to live or who wanted to attend university in the US. At that time, the local school system had initiated a bilingual/ESL program for incoming foreign students in grades K-12 . These students were predominantly refugees. In addition, there was a program in the Adult Basic Education Department for adults. However, this program met only four hours a week. Frances and Ande Clark decided to open up a "school" which would provide intensive language training for those students who needed it. Initially, IEI had three students. Presently, we have enrolled 121. Over the last twenty years, growth has definitely happened.

The purpose of the school is best expressed in our mission statement:

> **Our mission is to teach English with love and excellence in a friendly atmosphere, and to serve as a bridge between cultures. We believe our mission is best achieved by a combination of qualified, caring, and experienced teachers, an efficient administrative staff, and a diverse body of students with a sincere desire to learn.**

IEI has six terms of seven weeks every year. We offer a six-level, skill based program of Listening, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Conversation. We have a computer lab and a computer use training program available to students in Levels four or above. This computer lab has Internet access and e-mail capability.

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The idea of an entrance interview evolved over time. As most things, the creation of this interview was a process. For years, we had been using a personal interview as a component in our Oral Proficiency Interview for the purposes of placement. This interview was great for placement purposes but since the main goal of this oral interview was to place the students in the appropriate level of conversation, a lot of information was not easily available to either administrators nor teachers. About two years ago, we, as a staff, thought it was important that one person be the information gatherer and be the person with access to the information which may be needed at a later time. As a result, I decided to move the personal information gathering to a formal interview which I, as Academic Coordinator, would give within the student's first week of being in the school. There were certain things that we as teachers and as administrators wanted and needed to know. Based on these needs, I created a list of questions I would ask the student in a private, and hopefully, more relaxed setting than that of a testing situation. The present version of our entrance interview questions is at the end of this paper. Please note that these questions are not of a highly confidential nature although sometimes during the interview these types of issues are revealed. If students confide such information, no notation is made nor is the information shared among the staff.

I hold this interview with the students sometime during the first ten days after classes have started. By this time, I have gotten to know the students by name. I schedule the interviews during their reading/listening lab. Since the interviews usually last only 20 minutes or so, I am usually able to do 3 or 4 in an hour's time. I give the interview in my office. Although this is not ideal because of interrupting phones and lack of privacy, it is ideal in that after the interview, the students can always find me. As students talk, I create a notecard with the information on it. These notecards are alphabetized and are kept in a file box. After the interview I put the pertinent information into the computer and print out a report of the results.

The benefits of giving an interview such as this is well worth the time it takes. First of all, it enables me to build a rapport with the student which can become the basis of the student's relationship with the school, the program, and his/her teachers. The questions give me insight into

the student's experience and his/her hopes and dreams. The interview can also serve as a way of getting the student to think about how those hopes and dreams can be realized in this new environment. In addition, the interview alerts me to unrealistic expectations regarding the langua learning process. When a level one student tells me that he/she will study for seven weeks and then go to university, I know that there is a lot I have to do about lowering his/her expectations. No program is that great!!

In addition, the interview process gives me an opportunity to do cultural orientation with the students. This is especially important when the student is beginning to experience the first throes of culture shock. It helps them immensely to know that what they are experiencing is normal and that they are in a place where people understand. At this time, the students also talk about their living experience and, if they are in a host family, this is often the time and place that they are able to express their positive or negative feelings about their living experience. If there i problem, I am able to alert the housing coordinator and we are able to address the problem quickl and get the student into a better living situation. There is nothing more detrimental to a student's learning process than culture shock and a bad living situation. I truly believe that if they aren't "happy", they can't learn.

Another thing that comes out of the interview process is the awareness of the wide variety of experiences that our students have had. They speak many languages, usually more than most of their teachers. It is not unusual to have students who speak four or five languages. Many of our students are bankers, teachers, engineers, lawyers, doctors, or business men or women. This realization of their background makes us as teachers more sensitive to their needs and their frustrations of learning a new language when they are so competent in other fields. Finally, by conducting such an interview, I am able to immediately identify and counsel those students whose goal is to attend university in the United States. As a direct result of the interview process we have instigated an ongoing university counseling process. I talk with each student to help them identify a university or college which they want to attend, plan their TOEFL testing, write application letters, and generally am available to help them through the application process. By receiving such

ongoing counseling, the students are able to stay focused. Since implementing the interview process, the faculty has made use of the information in ways that enable them to better meet the needs of the individual student. Having this information at hand in one place and with one person allows teachers to get answers quickly when they have question about a particular student.

After using the entrance interview for a year, I decided to also begin an exiting interview process. I made this decision out of a need to again formalize the evaluation process which was already in place. For years, we had been getting information regarding the program and the results of the program of study from the students but this information was gathered through informal conversations and was not from every student and through formal written multiple choice evaluations with a space for students to write comments. As our numbers continued to increase, it became obvious that we needed to have better information so that we could continue to meet the developing needs of the student population. As a result, I developed the Exit Interview, a copy of which is at the end of this paper.

In order to conduct the exit interview, I first identify which students are leaving at the end of the term through a pre-registration process. At the beginning of the sixth week of the term, we ask the students whether they are returning to the school. Those students whom we identify as leaving are then scheduled for an exit interview. Again, this interview takes place in my office. At this time, the student and I compare the student's levels now to when they had entered, their projected to actual length of stay, and their stated goals from the entrance interview to what actually occurred while the student was at the school. In addition, I ask the student to respond <u>honestly</u> to questions regarding their own experience in the school. Because the paradigm of our school is that of a community, I am able to ask the student to give me suggestions to make the school better for the students. Even though many students would never give negative feedback about a school, a class or a teacher in their own country, they usually give me negative feedback when they understand that it may help the students who will follow them. This interview process also gives me an opportunity to talk to the students who are going home about reverse culture shock, to help students who are transferring to other schools about last minute needs or requirements, and to

discuss the demands of American University Education with those students who are transferring to a university campus.

The information we have gathered from the exit interview has been invaluable. First, it is an excellent way to bring closure to the learning language experience. I have found that the students want to talk about this experience and are quite honest in their self-evaluation. They often say that they could have learned more if they had attended more often or had done their homework. They often say that they learned a lot of English but that they need more. Even those students who have an adequate TOEFL or TOEIC score express concern as to whether they know enough English to go on to the next step. Their assessment of the program of study is equally honest. They may talk about how a class was helpful or how there was too much homework in the class. They will express a need for a new class or a longer class. For example, for the past six months, many students have expressed a need for a pronunciation class separate from Conversation classes. In response to this perceived need, we now offer a Pronunciation class with an eight student limit.

Sometimes students will come up with very innovative if strange suggestions. Often I have students tell me that IEI has too many of one country's group and that we should not take any more students from that country. I am always amused because, of course, that student always wants to stay at the school. It is always everyone else who needs to leave. In the same way, several students who have had a less than illustrious attendance career have told me that they thought the school was too easy on the attendance policy and that if a student misses three times the student should be sent home. When I pointed out that he/she would have been sent home the first term, they hastened to tell me the situation was different for them because.... However, there have been several good suggestions which are thoughtful and thought provoking about the arrangement of classrooms, use of the computer lab, communication issues, and the structure of the building . Although I never promise to fix the issue the way the student may want it to be fixed, I am able to gather the information and communicate it to those who may be able to address the problem. Finally, the use of this interview has helped me identify areas for development for the staff. Problems which have arisen between teachers and students generally fall into the categories of

miscommunication or misperceived expectations. As a result, we have been able to resolve many of these issues by working together to make our communication with the student clearer and more precise.

The results of the interview process, both the entrance and exit interview, are both tangible and intangible. Obviously, over the years, we have gathered some fantastic data. In addition, specific information has helped us improve both the academic and the activity programs at our institution in order to be more responsive to the student. We have been able to identify problem areas and develop solutions to fix these problems. We have been able to assess the program and see in which direction we want to develop.

Another important benefit of this interview process is that when TESOL establishes the accreditation process for IEPs, much of the data needed for the accreditation process will have already been collected. Much of the information regarding the students' expectation of and evaluation of the program is included on the interviews, which in combination with student evaluation of classes will provide the accrediting agency with data needed for evaluation purposes. In addition, we can also identify how our students have come to us. Through the course of this interview, we have discovered how many students have come to us as a result of word of mouth, catalogues, relatives or friends, or just accidentally. It has given us some interesting information that we can use in developing marketing materials for our program.

Finally, another tangible result is our ability to track the individual student academically as well as culturally. We are able to help them find the program of study they want to be part of after language training, aid them in the taking of TOEFL and TOEIC exams, help them make contacts within the local community, and serve as counselors if the need arises. We take them to doctors, dentists, bankers, and the driver's license testing center. We help them communicate with police and with insurance agents and adjusters. In short, we become their home away from home. By initially establishing communication in a warm atmosphere through the entrance interview, and by constantly evaluating our effectiveness through the exit interview, we are able to grow both as teachers and administrators as well as an institution.

More important, though, are the intangible results. The relationship which is initially developed with the student at the entrance interview provides a basis of trust on which students rely when the hard times come. They feel that someone is truly interested in them, knows their name, cares about their situation, and will help them if there is a need. This goes a long way in lowering the affective filter so that they can be "ready" to learn the language. Since the purpose of the institution for which I work is to relate to the whole person, not just to the student, use of the interview process has given us the opportunity to assess how well we achieve our mission, term by term and year by year, providing us with a vehicle for change and an ever present challenge to continue to become excellent.

International English Institute
Entrance Interview Questions

1. What country are you from? What do you do in your country? Do you work or do you go to school?

2. Why do you want to learn English? What is your goal for learning this language?

3. Have you ever taken the TOEFL test? What was your highest score? Do you need to take TOEFL test? Do you want to take a TOEIC test?

4. How did you hear about IEI? Who told you about this school?

5. How long do you plan on studying at our school?

6. Where do you live in Nashville? Host family? An apartment? International House? Is everything OK where you live?

7. Who are your teachers at the school/ what are your levels? Are your classes OK for you?

8. Tell me something about your family. Are you having any trouble with culture shock? Are you homesick?

9. How many languages do you speak? Is this the first time you have traveled outside your country? Tell me where you have traveled.

10. Are you making friends at the school? Are you having any problems? Is there any way that I can help you?

International English Institute
Exit Interview Questions

1. Where are you going to go after you leave IEI? Why are you leaving?
2. What are your levels?
3. Have you taken the TOEFL, Michigan, or TOEIC since you've been here? What is your highest score?
3. When you first came, you said that your goal was _____? Do you think you have met your goal? Has your goal changed?
4. Did you study as long as you thought you would? Longer or shorter?
5. Which class/course do you think taught you the most English?
6. What has been the most positive experience for you here at our school?
7. What do you think about your level of ability in English now?
8. Would you tell someone else to come to IEI? Why?
9. How could IEI be a better place for students? Please give me some suggestions.